

primary documents

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First World War Forum

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Primary Documents - The Corfu Declaration, 20 July 1917

With the Austro-Hungarian empire rapidly crumbling in 1918 moves were well underway to instigate the creation of a new Greater Serbia state.

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The establishment of the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes - which was formally declared on 1 December 1918 and renamed Yugoslavia in October 1929 - demonstrated the clear determination on the part of Serbs, Croats, Slovenes, Montenegrins, Bosnians, Macedonians and others to win self-determination from Austria; the collapse of the empire brought such nationalist agitation to a head.



Reproduced below is the text of the [Corfu Declaration](#) of 20 July 1917 which established the Allied-backed principles upon which the new state would be created and governed.

[Click here](#) to read the declaration of the Montenegrin assembly - the Skupstina - which affirmed its intention to join the new state and to depose its own monarch, King Nicholas, in favour of Serbian monarch [King Peter](#).

[Click here](#) to read the address of the [Ante Trumbic](#)-led Yugoslav National Council, dated 24 November 1918, which expressed its concern at Italian regional territorial aspirations arising from the April [1915 Treaty of London](#). [Click here](#) to read the Serbian government's response to the Yugoslav National Council's address.

The Corfu Declaration, 20 July 1917

The first step toward building the new State of Yugoslavia

1. The State of the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, who are also known by the name of Southern Slays or Yugoslavs, will be a free and independent kingdom, with an indivisible territory and unity of power. This State will be a constitutional, democratic, and Parliamentary monarchy, with the Karageorgevich dynasty, which has always shared the ideals and feelings of the nation in placing above everything else the national liberty and will at its head.
2. The name of this State will be the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, and the title of the sovereign will be King of the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes.
3. This State will have one coat-of-arms, only one flag, and one crown.
4. The four different flags of the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes will have equal rights, and may be hoisted freely on all occasions. The same will obtain for the four different coats-of-arms.
5. The three national denominations, the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, are equal before the law in all the territory of the kingdom, and each may freely use it on all occasions in public life and before all authorities.
6. The two Cyrillic and Latin alphabets also have the same rights and every one may freely use them in all the territory of the kingdom. The royal and local self-governing authorities have the rights and ought to employ the two alphabets according to the desire of the citizens.
7. All religions are recognized, and may be free and publicly practiced. The Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Mussulman religions, which are most professed in our country, will be equal, and will enjoy the same rights in relation to the State. In view of these principles, the Legislature will be careful to preserve the religious peace in conformity with the spirit and tradition of our entire nation.
8. The Gregorian calendar will be adopted as soon as possible.
9. The territory of the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes will comprise all the territory where our nation lives in compact masses and without discontinuity, and where it could not be mutilated without injuring the vital interests of the community. Our nation does not ask for anything which belongs to others, and only claims that which belongs to it. It desires to free itself and establish its unity. That is why it conscientiously and firmly rejects every partial solution of the problem of its freedom from the Austro-Hungarian domination.
10. The Adriatic Sea, in the interests of liberty and equal rights of all nations, is to be free and open to all and each.
11. All citizens throughout the territory of the kingdom are equal, and enjoy the same rights in regard to the State and the law.
12. The election of Deputies to the national representation will take place under universal suffrage, which is to be equal, direct, and secret. The same will apply to the elections in the communes and other administrative institutions. A vote will be taken in each commune.

Primary Docs

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13. The Constitution to be established after the conclusion of peace by the Constituent Assembly elected by universal, direct, and secret suffrage will serve as a basis for the life of the State. It will be the origin and ultimate end of all the powers and all rights by which the whole national life will be regulated. The Constitution will give the people the opportunity of exercising its particular energies in local autonomies, regulated by natural, social, and economic conditions. The Constitution must be adopted in its entirety by a numerical majority of the Constituent Assembly, and all other laws passed by the Constituent Assembly will not come into force until they have been sanctioned by the King.



Thus the united nation of Serbs, Croatsians, and Slovenes will form a State of twelve million inhabitants. This State will be a guarantee of their national independence and of their general national progress and civilization, and a powerful rampart against the pressure of the Germans, and an inseparable ally of all civilized peoples and States.

Having proclaimed the principle of right and liberty and of international justice, it will form a worthy part of the new society of nations.

Signed at Corfu, July 20, 1917, by the President of the Council and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Serbia, Nikola Pashitch, and the President of the Yugoslav Committee, Dr. Ante Trumbic.

Source: *Source Records of the Great War*, Vol. VII, ed. Charles F. Horne, *National Alumni* 1923

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 Saturday, 22 August, 2009  Michael Duffy



The Austro-Hungarian declaration of war was the first ever delivered by telegram.

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